Apostles Beyond the Twelve

A biblical studies research paper by B. Dutch Seyfarth

A survey of biblical, historical, and early Christian church manuscripts regarding apostles named beyond the original Twelve

Icon of Apostles Silas, Silvanus, Crescens, Epenetus, and Andronicus of the Seventy

Hypothesis:

This research paper presents compelling scriptural and extensive historical manuscript evidence demonstrating that Christ's gift of divinely appointed apostles for His church endures from the first century until Christ's second coming. I humbly offer this research paper as a gentle invitation to reconsider any and all preconceived notions, traditions, and simply go back to what Holy Scripture and church history actually wrote about.

A note on scope: this paper is intentionally denomination-neutral. It draws only on biblical Scripture, ancient historical manuscripts, and the documented stories of notable apostolic missionaries from many church backgrounds — Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, and others — who faithfully preached and served Jesus Christ. This research paper does not argue for the doctrine, authority, or superiority of any single denomination.

Thank you, God bless you,
B. Dutch Seyfarth

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version (1611).

PART I: New Testament Scriptural References to Named Apostles

The Original Twelve

> *Matthew 10:2-4 (KJV) — "Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him."*

Parallel lists appear in Mark 3:16-19, Luke 6:14-16, and Acts 1:13 (with Matthias replacing Judas Iscariot after Acts 1:26).

Paul — Apostle to the Gentiles, Not One of the Twelve

> *Romans 1:1 (KJV) — "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God."*

> *Galatians 1:1 (KJV) — "Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;)"*

Paul is the clearest biblical proof that "apostle" was never a closed list of twelve. He was called years after the resurrection (Acts 9), yet Scripture unambiguously calls him an apostle — one who calls himself "least of the apostles" (1 Corinthians 15:9) while claiming to have "laboured more abundantly than they all" (1 Corinthians 15:10).

Barnabas — Explicitly Called an Apostle

> *Acts 14:14 (KJV) — "Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out,"*

This is a direct, unambiguous scriptural designation of Barnabas as an apostle — a man not one of the Twelve, yet whom church tradition counts among the Seventy personally chosen and sent by Christ (see Part III). An epistle traditionally attributed to Barnabas also survives from the earliest Christian centuries, alongside those of the traditional New Testament apostolic epistles.

Andronicus and Junia — "Of Note Among the Apostles"

> *Romans 16:7 (KJV) — "Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellowprisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me."*

This verse has generated scholarly discussion, since "Junia" was a common Roman name, raising the question of a woman called notable "among the apostles." Either way, the verse extends "apostle" to two more names beyond the Twelve and Paul, decades after the resurrection.

Other New Testament Figures Called “Apostle” (Greek: *apostolos*) in a Broader Sense

1 Thessalonians 2:6 — Paul writes of himself, Silvanus (Silas), and Timothy together: “we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.” The KJV renders this plainly as “the apostles of Christ,” applied jointly to all three men.

1 Corinthians 4:9 — Paul writes “God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death,” in a passage most naturally read as including his broader missionary companions, not himself alone.

2 Corinthians 8:23 — of Titus and unnamed brethren: “they are the messengers [Greek: *apostoloi*] of the churches, and the glory of Christ.” Most English translations render *apostoloi* here as “messengers” rather than “apostles” for sense, but the underlying Greek word is identical to the word translated “apostle” elsewhere.

Philippians 2:25 — Epaphroditus is called “your messenger” (Greek: *apostolon*), the same underlying word.

Galatians 1:19 — James, “the Lord’s brother,” is listed among those Paul consulted as apostles: “But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord’s brother.”

Paul and Barnabas at Lystra, engraving after Raphael (Rome, 1778)

PART II: Ephesians 4, Apostles Are Christ's Gift to His Church

> *Ephesians 4:11-13 (KJV)* — *"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."*

This passage names apostleship as one of the gifts Christ gave to the Church, alongside prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers — offices that few dispute have continued throughout church history. The interpretive question that divides Christians is whether "apostle" here is meant to function the same way across all generations "till we all come," or whether it describes a foundational, non-repeating office limited to those who had seen the risen Christ and were directly commissioned by Him (compare Acts 1:21-22, where the qualification given for Matthias's selection was having personally accompanied Jesus "beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up").

Ephesians 2:19-20 (KJV), often cited on the other side of this question, reads: "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." Those who see the apostolic office as closed point to the image of a "foundation" — laid once, not repeatedly re-laid — as evidence that the apostolic and prophetic office particularly tied to eyewitness revelation ceased with the first generation, even while the *function* of apostolic, missionary-founding work continues under other terms.

Both readings of Ephesians 4 are held by serious, sincere students of Scripture, and the historical record below does not resolve the debate — it simply shows that many later Christians, including entire church traditions, did not treat "apostle" as sealed shut at AD 100.

The Great Theatre of Ephesus, where Paul preached (Acts 19). Photo: adventurepatches.com

PART III: Christ Ordains and Sends Out Seventy Disciples? Or Apostles?

> *Luke 10:1 (KJV)* — *"After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come."*

> *Luke 10:17 (KJV)* — *"And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name."*

(Some manuscripts read "seventy-two" rather than "seventy" — both numbers appear in the manuscript tradition, which is why sources sometimes give either figure.)

Eusebius's Use of "Apostle" for the Seventy

The mission Christ gave the Seventy in Luke 10 mirrors the charge He gave the Twelve in Matthew 10. Eusebius of Caesarea, in his *Ecclesiastical History* (Book I, Chapter 13), reflects this equivalence, directly applying the word "apostle" to Thaddaeus, one of the Seventy, in his account of the Abgar legend of Edessa: "Thomas, one of the twelve apostles, under divine impulse sent Thaddeus, who was also numbered among the seventy disciples of Christ, to Edessa, as a preacher and evangelist of the teaching of Christ."

Eusebius's source (translated from a Syriac archive document, preserved in full at topostext.org) has Edessa announce to King Abgar that "an apostle of Jesus was come" — referring to Thaddaeus, a man of the Seventy. A 19th-century translator's note (in the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers series) observes Eusebius "allows the word 'apostle,' so common in its wider sense, to stand throughout" — a broader functional term, even while distinguishing rank when precision mattered.

Were the Seventy simply disciples, or apostles in the same sense as the Twelve? For centuries, the church's own writers treated them as both. A major 4th-century historian, writing before "apostle" narrowed to mean only the Twelve plus Paul, comfortably called a man of the Seventy an apostle. Fuller account: Wikipedia's Addai of Edessa.

Eusebius of Caesarea depicted with a halo, Garima Gospels (Ethiopia, 4th–6th c.)

Eastern Orthodox Tradition: The Synaxis of the Seventy Apostles

This ancient and medieval consensus is preserved formally in the Eastern Orthodox Church's annual feast, the Synaxis of the Seventy Apostles, celebrated January 4th — naming this wider group "apostles" as settled liturgical tradition, not merely popular piety. This paper cites that tradition, and the Armenian and Ethiopian traditions discussed below, strictly as historical evidence of how "apostle" has been understood across church history — not as an endorsement of the doctrine or authority of any one church body. The Orthodox Church in America's official synaxarion states this feast "was established by the Orthodox Church to indicate the equal honor of each of the Seventy," who were "sent two by two by the Lord Jesus Christ to go before Him into the cities He would visit (Luke 10:1)."

Notably, the traditional list of the Seventy, compiled from Scripture, the Fathers, and early historians (chiefly credited to St. Dorotheus of Tyre and later corrected by St. Demetrius of Rostov), includes several names of particular interest here: **Barnabas** — venerated as "leader of the Seventy and companion of Paul," feast June 11; **Andronicus** — feast May 17 and July 30; **Silas/Silvanus** — feast July 30; **Mark the Evangelist**; **Luke the Evangelist**; **James, the Lord's brother**; **Timothy** and Titus; and **Stephen the Archdeacon** and the other deacons of Acts 6. The full traditional list is available via OrthodoxWiki: Seventy Apostles.

The Orthodox tradition also recognizes a distinct, later category: saints given the title "**Equal-to-the-Apostles**" (Greek: *Isapostolos*) — an honorific bestowed on missionary saints of any century whose evangelistic work was judged comparable in scale to the apostles', such as Cyril and Methodius (Equal-to-the-Apostles to the Slavs), Nino (Equal-to-the-Apostles of Georgia), and Constantine himself in some traditions. OrthodoxWiki's article on the Apostles notes that titles like "Apostle to the North" or "Apostle to the Goths" have also circulated historically as popular epithets for missionary saints, though some regard this usage as "not traditionally Orthodox" in the formal, technical sense — i.e., a distinction is maintained between the canonized office held by the Twelve, Paul, and the Seventy, and the honorific, popular use of "apostle" for later missionaries.

Apostles Timothy, Silvanus, and Paul — miniature, Acts and Epistles of the Apostles, Byzantine, late 13th century (Moscow). Source: pravoslavie.ru

PART IV: Post-Biblical Figures Called “Apostle” in Historical and Orthodox Tradition

The examples in this Part are drawn from Armenian, Ethiopian, Syriac, and other ancient church traditions. They are surveyed here strictly as historical and manuscript evidence of how the word “apostle” has been used in the centuries since the New Testament — not as an endorsement of the doctrine, authority, or exclusive claims of any one church body.

Gregory the Illuminator (c. 257–331) — “Apostle of Armenia”

In Armenian, Gregory is known as **Grigor Lusavorich**, a title meaning “Gregory the Enlightener” or “the Illuminator” — a name that in Armenian usage functions almost as a second baptismal name, inseparable from his own. The primary ancient source, Agathangelos (4th/5th century), explicitly describes him as “the first apostle of Armenia.”

According to the traditional narrative, Gregory was the son of a Parthian nobleman who assassinated the Armenian king; the infant Gregory was smuggled to Caesarea in Cappadocia and raised a Christian, concealing his lineage. He later returned to serve in the court of King Tiridates III (Trdat), who, upon discovering both Gregory’s faith and his true parentage, had him tortured and cast into a deep pit at **Khor Virap** (“deep well”/“deep dungeon”) for a period tradition remembers as twelve to fourteen years, kept alive only by a widow who secretly lowered bread to him each day.

Tradition holds that Tiridates was later afflicted with a severe illness (some accounts describe a boar-like madness), and his sister Khosrovidukht received a vision that only the forgotten prisoner in the pit could heal him. Gregory was drawn out alive, healed the king, and Tiridates converted along with the royal household. In 301 AD, Armenia became the first state in the world to adopt Christianity as its official religion — a date many historians place decades before Constantine’s own conversion and Rome’s later adoption of Christianity as state religion. Gregory was consecrated the first **Catholicos of All Armenians**, a title and see that continues in unbroken succession today, with the current Catholicos, Karekin II, numbered as Gregory’s 132nd successor.

Armenian tradition also holds that Gregory received a vision at Vagharshapat in which Christ descended and struck the earth with a golden hammer to show where the first cathedral should be built; the resulting church took the name **Etchmiadzin**, meaning “the place where the Only-Begotten Son descended,” and remains the spiritual seat of the Armenian Apostolic Church to this day.

Gregory the Illuminator, bas-relief at the Church of the Holy Cross, Aghtamar

National Memory: Armenia's Living Commemoration of Its "Apostle"

Unlike other figures in this survey, Gregory's status as "apostle" is not merely a matter of ancient text or academic footnote — it is actively commemorated by the modern Armenian nation, state institutions, and church alike. Armenia's own government-run tourism authority states in its promotional literature that "since the apostles Bartholomew and Thaddeus attempted to spread Christianity in Armenia during the first century, the national church of Armenians is regarded as Apostolic," directly tying Gregory's later mission to the same apostolic lineage claimed for the Twelve. The very name of the national church — the Armenian Apostolic Church — embeds this claim into Armenia's civic identity, not merely its liturgical vocabulary.

In 2001, Armenia held a nationwide Jubilee Year marking the 1,700th anniversary of its conversion, an occasion significant enough to draw Pope John Paul II to Yerevan, Etchmiadzin, and Khor Virap for three days of joint commemoration with Catholicos Karekin II; Pope Francis made a similar visit in 2016. For that same Jubilee, Armenia built the enormous Saint Grigor Lusavorich Cathedral in central Yerevan — the largest cathedral in the South Caucasus, seating exactly 1,700 people in deliberate reference to the anniversary — built specifically to house relics of Gregory. Etchmiadzin and Khor Virap remain the country's most-visited pilgrimage sites, drawing both popes specifically because of Gregory's role in the nation's founding Christian identity.

Modern Armenian liturgical prayer continues to place Gregory in direct company with the biblical apostles rather than beneath them as a lesser missionary figure. The 2016 Joint Declaration signed by Pope Francis and Catholicos Karekin II at Etchmiadzin closed by quoting the ancient prayer of Saint Nerses the Gracious, invoking intercession from "the Holy Mother of God, John the Baptist, the first martyr Saint Stephen, Saint Gregory our Illuminator, the Holy Apostles, Prophets, Divines, Martyrs, Patriarchs, Hermits, Virgins and all Your saints" — a formula naming Gregory in the same breath as, though textually distinct from, "the Holy Apostles," reflecting thirteen centuries of Armenian devotional language treating him as belonging to that same company.

Taken together — the ancient text of Agathangelos, the church's own formal name, the national government's tourism literature, the 1,700-year jubilee attended by two popes, a 1,700-seat cathedral built in his honor, and continued liturgical language placing him alongside "the Holy Apostles" — Gregory the Illuminator may be the clearest case in this survey of a post-biblical figure whose identity as "apostle" has been sustained continuously, publicly, and officially for over a millennium and a half, rather than recovered only recently by historians.

Saint Gregory the Illuminator's Deliverance from the Pit at Khor Virap — traditional icon

Frumentius (4th century) — “Apostle of Ethiopia”

The primary Western source for Frumentius’s life is Rufinus of Aquileia’s *Historia Ecclesiastica* (Book I, Chapter 9, written c. 401–403), who received the account directly from Frumentius’s own brother, Aedesius, whom Rufinus met personally in Tyre. According to Rufinus, a Tyrian merchant named Meropius took his young nephews Frumentius and Aedesius on a trading voyage down the Red Sea; when their ship put in at an African port for supplies, the crew was massacred and only the two boys were spared, being taken into the service of the Aksumite royal court. Aedesius became the king’s cupbearer, while Frumentius, noted for his intelligence, was appointed tutor to the young crown prince, Ezana.

When the old king died, the widowed queen asked the two brothers to remain and help govern the kingdom during Ezana’s minority. During these years, Frumentius quietly nurtured the small Christian community already present among Aksum’s foreign merchants and traders. When Ezana came of age and took the throne, Aedesius returned home to Tyre, but Frumentius, “eager for the conversion of Ethiopia,” traveled instead to Alexandria to appeal to its bishop — Athanasius himself — for a bishop to be sent to Aksum. Athanasius, judging no one better suited than Frumentius, consecrated him bishop on the spot and sent him back. Tradition dates his consecration to around 328–330 AD, though some scholars place it as late as 340–346.

The single strongest piece of independent, non-textual evidence for this entire episode comes from archaeology and numismatics, not from any church history. King Ezana’s own coinage shows an abrupt and total change: earlier Aksumite coins bear the pagan disc-and-crescent of the god Mahrem, while coins from later in his reign replace that symbol completely with a Christian cross — a transition scholars date to roughly 324–333 AD, corroborated independently by Ezana’s own royal inscriptions. This makes Aksum’s conversion one of the rare cases in ancient history where a king’s religious conversion is confirmed by physical currency struck in his own name, independent of any later hagiography.

Frumentius is remembered in Ethiopia to this day by his Ge’ez title, **Abba Salama, Kesate Berhan** (“Father of Peace, Revealer of Light”), and the title **abuna** (“our father”) he received from the Ethiopians — still the title used for the head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church today. Ethiopian church tradition itself, not merely later Western commentators, uses the word “apostle” for the office Frumentius came to fill. The Ethiopian Synaxarium preserves a tradition in which the Ethiopian high priest Anbarom, explaining what the kingdom still lacked despite already knowing of Christ through the eunuch of Acts 8, reportedly said: “we do not have an Apostle who can administer the rite of Baptism and the Eucharist” — and it was precisely this office that Frumentius was sent to Alexandria to obtain.

The Ethiopian Eunuch: Ethiopia’s First-Century Apostolic Root

Acts 8:26-39 (KJV) recounts Philip’s encounter with “a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure,” who was reading Isaiah on the road from Jerusalem when Philip explained the gospel to him and baptized him — placing a named Ethiopian convert within the apostolic generation itself, decades before Frumentius was born. As early as the 2nd century, St. Irenaeus of Lyons wrote in his *Adversus Haereses* that the Ethiopian eunuch was sent back to Ethiopia to proclaim the God he had come to believe in — a 2nd-century writer already treating the eunuch’s return as a missionary commission, an apostolic sending in substance, even where the word “apostle” itself is not used.

Ethiopia: A Nation That Still Honors Its Apostolic Heritage

Ethiopia's Christian origin story remains part of the country's living civic and religious identity. The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church describes itself as "the first indigenous Christian church from Sub-Saharan Africa," predating Western missionaries by over a millennium. Ethiopia is also the only African nation never colonized by a European power (aside from a brief Italian occupation), a fact Ethiopians connect to their ancient Christian identity.

Two national holidays keep this heritage alive. Meskel ("the Cross"), held every September 27th, commemorates the finding of the True Cross and was inscribed by UNESCO in 2013. Timkat, Ethiopia's Epiphany celebration, involves processions of tabots (Ark of the Covenant replicas) and was inscribed by UNESCO in 2019.

Ethiopian national memory ties its Christian identity to biblical Israel itself: the national epic, the Kebra Nagast ("Glory of Kings"), holds that the Ethiopian royal line descended from King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, and that the Ark of the Covenant was brought to Aksum, where the Church maintains it is still kept today.

Ethiopia's Christian identity and its political independence are, in national memory, the same story told twice. At the Battle of Adwa (1896), Emperor Menelik II's army defeated an invading Italian force so decisively that Italy was forced to recognize Ethiopian sovereignty — the only African nation to do so during the "Scramble for Africa." Priests carried the tabot onto the battlefield itself, treating national survival as inseparable from Christian identity.

This same identity is carved into the landscape at Lalibela, where eleven medieval churches were hewn directly out of solid volcanic rock under the 12th-century king Gebre Mesqel Lalibela, building a "New Jerusalem" after Muslim conquests cut off pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Inscribed by UNESCO in 1978, Lalibela remains a living pilgrimage site, especially crowded at Ethiopian Christmas (Genna).

Ethiopian triptych depicting Jesus and the Apostles with Saint George and the dragon, Mary with Jesus and the Last Supper, and the Crucifixion with the Apostles (18th–19th c.)

The Nine Saints (arrived Ethiopia, c. 480)

A further wave of missionary monks — the Nine Saints: Abba Aregawi, Abba Pantalewon, Abba Gerima, Abba Afse, and five others — are credited in Ethiopian Orthodox tradition with firmly planting the apostolic (their term) faith in the Ge'ez language and founding Ethiopian monasticism, a century and a half after Frumentius.

Addai/Thaddeus and Edessa

As discussed in Part III, Eusebius's account has the Edessenes themselves declaring "an apostle of Jesus was come" of Thaddaeus specifically — making this the most textually explicit ancient use of "apostle" for a non-Twelve, non-Pauline missionary figure. See Addai of Edessa (Wikipedia) for the fuller legend and its manuscript history.

Ulfilas (c. 311–383) — "Apostle of the Goths"

Here the historical record is more modest: the ancient sources (Philostorgius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.5; the letter of Auxentius of Durostorum) narrate his life and consecration in detail but do not use "apostle" as a title in the surviving text. Ulfilas is remembered chiefly for devising the Gothic alphabet and producing the first translation of the Bible into a Germanic language, work that shaped Gothic Christian identity for generations. The title "Apostle of the Goths" is well-attested in later usage but appears to be a modern scholarly convention (it is the title of an 1885 biography by C. A. A. Scott) rather than an ancient designation — worth noting precisely because it shows the honorific title was sometimes applied by historians centuries later, based on the substance of a man's missionary work, rather than by his own contemporaries.

Ulfilas teaching Christianity to the Goths, early 20th-century illustration

PART V: Has Christ Provided Apostles in Modern Times?

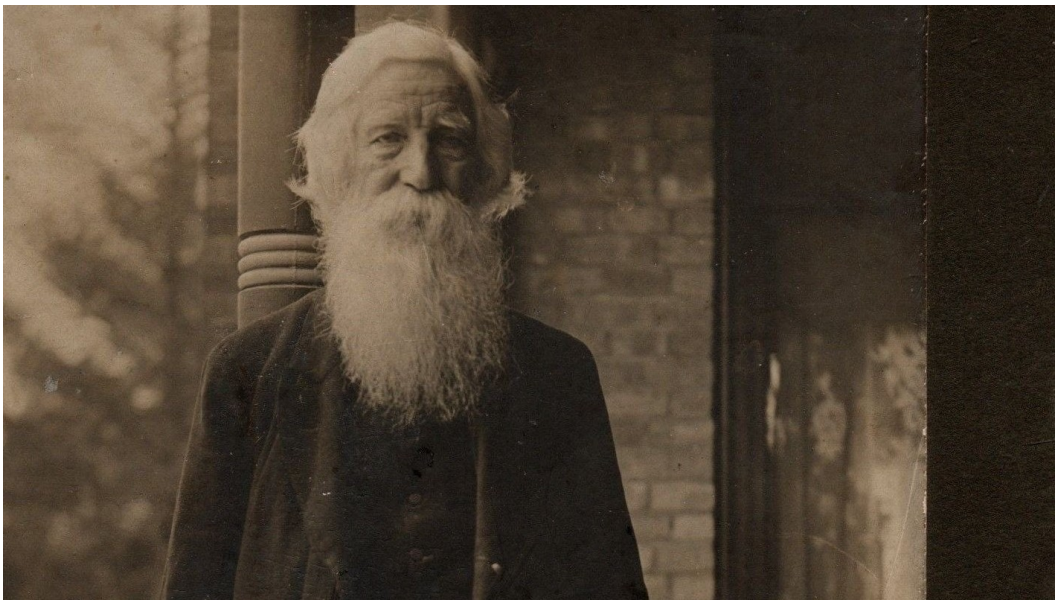
The hypothesis under consideration here rests on reading Ephesians 4:11-13 as describing an office Christ continues to give “till we all come... unto a perfect man” — that is, until the church’s final maturity at the end of the age, not merely until the apostolic generation died out. On that reading, the historical pattern documented in Part IV would be *evidence for* the hypothesis: whole church traditions, for two thousand years, have not treated “apostle” as sealed shut with the original Twelve plus Paul.

It’s worth laying out the alternative view fairly, since serious Christians land on both sides:

• **The case for a closed, foundational apostolic office** rests mainly on Ephesians 2:20 (“built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets”) and the Acts 1:21-22 qualification that an apostle in the fullest sense had to have personally witnessed the risen Christ — a qualification no one living today can meet. On this view, later “apostles” are apostles only in a secondary, honorific, or “small-a” sense.

• **The case for ongoing apostleship** rests on Ephesians 4’s “till we all come” language, on the New Testament’s own looser usage of *apostolos* for Barnabas, Andronicus, Junia, Silas, and Timothy, and on the continuous, formal tradition of calling great missionary founders “apostle” or “equal-to-the-apostles.”

Regarding specific modern figures such as **John G. Paton** (19th-century missionary to the New Hebrides/Vanuatu) and **Reinhard Bonnke** (20th/21st-century evangelist credited with millions of professed conversions across Africa), it’s true that popular Christian biography and some charismatic/Pentecostal traditions today do use “apostle” as a functional description of such figures — language that echoes the older *Isapostolos* tradition more than it claims membership in the original Twelve. Whether that usage is theologically correct, honorific, or simply popular shorthand remains a live, sincerely-contested question rather than a settled one across Christianity as a whole.



John G. Paton, missionary to the New Hebrides

Lesser-Known Missionary “Apostles”: A Chain from the Middle Ages to the Modern Era

Between the ancient figures of Part IV and household names like Paton and Bonnke stands a long, well-documented chain of missionaries — many largely forgotten today, and drawn from many different church backgrounds (Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Congregationalist, and others), surveyed here purely for the pattern of their labor and not as an endorsement of any one tradition — who devoted themselves specifically to preaching and teaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ among peoples the wider world regarded as “unreachable” or dangerous, including societies practicing human sacrifice, ritual cannibalism, or chattel slavery. What unites them across every century and continent below is not any single denomination or church institution, but the same simple, repeated pattern of the New Testament itself: preaching Christ, teaching new believers, and baptizing converts “for the remission of sins,” in the words of Peter’s own charge at Pentecost (Acts 2:38, KJV): “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

The Caribbean and the Spanish Americas

Not every Catholic figure of the conquistador era pursued gold; several are remembered specifically for opposing the abuse of native peoples while continuing to preach the Gospel to them. **Antonio de Montesinos** (c. 1475–1540), a missionary friar on the island of Hispaniola, publicly denounced the enslavement of the Taino people in a famous sermon on December 21, 1511. His preaching directly converted a young colonist named **Bartolome de las Casas** (1484–1566), who abandoned his own landholdings and became the most famous defender of indigenous rights in the Americas, remembered in later tradition as “Apostle to the Indies.”

In present-day Colombia, the missionary priest **Pedro Claver** (1580–1654) devoted four decades to the enslaved Africans arriving at the port of Cartagena, vowing to be “the slave of the blacks forever.” He personally preached, taught, and baptized more than 300,000 people and is still honored today as “the apostle of the slaves.”

Paraguay: The Guarani Reductions

The missionary priest **Roque Gonzalez de Santa Cruz** (1576–1628) founded the system of reducciones — self-governing native settlements built specifically to shield the Guarani people from slave raiders while teaching them the Gospel. He was killed with a tomahawk in 1628, becoming, according to Church historians, the first martyr born in the New World.

North America: The Missionary Martyrs Among the Huron and Iroquois

Between 1642 and 1649, eight French missionaries and lay assistants — including Jean de Brebeuf (1593–1649) and Isaac Jogues (1607–1646) — were tortured and killed while preaching the Gospel among the Huron people. Canonized together in 1930 as the “North American Martyrs,” their own writings and letters make theirs some of the best-documented missionary work of the era.

New England: “The Apostle to the Indians”

John Eliot (1604–1690), a minister at Roxbury, Massachusetts, spent almost sixty years preaching to the Algonquian-speaking peoples of New England and was known ever since as the **“Apostle to the Indians.”** He learned the Massachusett language well enough to translate the entire Bible into it, producing in 1663 the first complete Bible printed anywhere in North America — and organized his converts, no longer known by their tribal names but simply as “the Praying Indians,” into self-governing towns patterned after Old Testament law.

Eliot’s converts paid dearly for their faith during King Philip’s War (1675–1676), when panic swept the English colonies amid the Wampanoag uprising led by Metacomet. Fearing that Christian Indians might secretly aid the enemy, the Massachusetts General Court ordered hundreds of Praying Indians — including entire congregations from Natick and the other praying towns Eliot had founded — rounded up and ferried, near midnight in October 1675, to Deer Island, a barren, wind-scoured strip in Boston Harbor. Left with almost no food, shelter, or winter clothing, they endured a New England winter in the open; more than half of those interned are believed to have died of exposure, starvation, and disease before spring.

Eliot did not stand by silently. Firsthand accounts report that he tried to row a boat of supplies out to the island himself, only for it to be capsized by angry colonists who nearly drowned him for the attempt. He and fellow missionary Daniel Gookin continued pressing the colonial government on the Praying Indians’ behalf throughout the war, even as mobs threatened them both. Those who survived Deer Island returned in the spring of 1676 to find their praying towns burned or seized; Eliot, then in his seventies, spent much of what remained of his life helping rebuild what he could of the communities he had spent decades building.

“Eliot, the First Missionary Among the Indians” — 19th-century engraving

The South Pacific: Missionaries to Societies Practicing Cannibalism and Human Sacrifice

No region of the world produced more, or better-documented, missionary martyrdoms among cannibal-practicing societies than 19th-century Oceania. **John Williams** (1796–1839), the "Apostle of Polynesia," arrived in the Society Islands in 1817. Eager to reach islands no missionary had visited, Williams built a 60-foot schooner, the *Messenger of Peace*, in fifteen weeks at Rarotonga in 1827. Returning to the Pacific in 1838, Williams was clubbed to death and eaten at Erromango in the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) in November 1839.

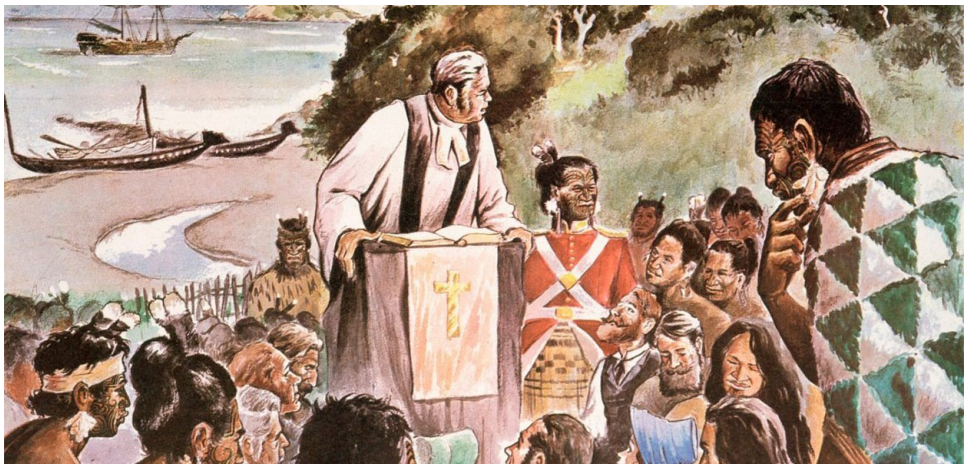
Perhaps most famous of all these apostolic missionaries is **John G. Paton** (1824–1907), missionary to the New Hebrides, whose long and eventful career among cannibal-practicing tribes has filled entire books and would merit a research paper devoted entirely to his life and labors.

On Aneityum, **John Geddie** (1815–1872), a Scottish-born Presbyterian minister, arrived in 1848 to a population practicing infanticide and cannibalism. He labored there for twenty-four years, until both had been abandoned. His epitaph reads: "When he landed in 1848, there were no Christians here, and when he left in 1872, there were no heathen."

James Chalmers (1841–1901), nicknamed "Tamate," was killed and eaten at Goaribari Island, Papua New Guinea, in 1901. In Fiji, **Thomas Baker** (1832–1867) was killed and eaten at Nabutautau in 1867 — the only missionary ever cannibalized in Fiji's history; in 2003, the village held a formal reconciliation ceremony with his living descendants, covered by international press.

On Futuna, **Peter Chanel** (1803–1841) was struck down with an axe in 1841. Within a year the entire island had converted; he was canonized in 1954 as the "Protomartyr of Oceania."

Several others deserve mention: **Henry Nott** (1774–1844) waited twenty-two years for his first Tahitian convert before translating the complete Tahitian Bible. **Samuel Marsden** (1765–1838), the "Apostle of New Zealand," preached the first Christian sermon on New Zealand soil in 1814. In Fiji, John Hunt (1812–1848) and James Calvert helped bring chief Ratu Seru Cakobau to convert in 1854. And bishop John Coleridge Patteson (1827–1871) was speared to death on Nukapu in 1871 campaigning against Pacific slave-trading.



"Oihi Bay, Christmas Day 1814" — Samuel Marsden preaching the first Christian sermon in New Zealand, painting by Jack Morgan, 1964

Korea: Missionaries Who Taught a Nation to Read So They Could Read the Bible

Few mission fields illustrate the difficulty of apostolic labor better than 19th-century Korea, the “Hermit Kingdom,” closed to foreigners. Scottish missionary John Ross (1842–1915) could not legally enter the country; he worked instead from across the border in Manchuria, learning Korean from traders. There he discovered that Hangul, the Korean script, was phonetic and remarkably simple — far more accessible than the classical Chinese characters favored by the aristocracy.

Working with fellow missionary John McIntyre and Korean assistants — including former ginseng peddler Seo Sang-ryun, baptized by Ross — Ross began his translation with the Gospel of Luke in 1882, publishing the first complete Korean New Testament in 1887, at real risk to his own life and to his Korean collaborators, since possessing Christian Scripture in the closed kingdom could mean imprisonment or worse.

Like the Apostle Paul writing and distributing his epistles into a hostile world nearly twenty centuries earlier, Ross entrusted his translation to local believers who carried it forward long after he was gone. Teaching in Hangul rather than the aristocratic Chinese script changed Korea far beyond theology, letting ordinary Koreans learn to read for the first time, a legacy alongside Ulfilas’s Gothic alphabet and John Eliot’s Massachusett Bible.

Many Koreans who read Ross’s translations professed faith in Jesus Christ and sought baptism years before any Western missionary was permitted to enter the country. Seo Sang-ryun carried the printed Gospels back to his home village of Sorae in Hwanghae Province, where he gathered believers in secret and founded Korea’s first Protestant congregation — built entirely on the strength of Ross’s translated Scriptures, before a single foreign missionary had set foot in the country.

John Ross with an early Hangul translation of Scripture

Why This Entire Chain of Missionaries Fits the Hypothesis

Every single missionary surveyed in this chain — Montesinos, Las Casas, Claver, Gonzalez, Brebeuf, Jogues, Eliot, Williams, Geddie, Chalmers, Baker, Chanel, and Ross with the founders of the Korean church — fits the hypothesis of this paper, not merely as an inspiring parallel, but by the same functional definition Scripture itself uses for an apostle. Each one meets all three marks the New Testament applies to apostleship, regardless of whether the specific word “apostle” happens to survive in the record for that individual name:

First, each was **personally sent** across a cultural and often physical frontier the Gospel had never crossed before — the plain meaning of the Greek *apostolos*, “one sent,” and the same qualifying mark Paul claims for his own calling in Romans 1:1 and Galatians 1:1. In every case, no prior Christian missionary had gone before them into that specific field.

Second, each **planted a self-sustaining church** that continued and multiplied after its founder was gone — the same test Paul applies to his own ministry in 1 Corinthians 9:1-2 (KJV): “Are not ye my work in the Lord? ... for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord.”

Third, each **suffered, or risked suffering**, exactly what Christ told the original Twelve to expect. In Matthew 10:16-18 (KJV), Jesus warned His apostles, “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves ... they will deliver you up ... and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake.” This is the identical pattern of the original apostles, of whom church tradition holds all but John died a martyr’s death.

Several of these missionaries were, in fact, also called “apostle” by name in their own lifetimes or immediately afterward — by ordinary believers, not later theologians reaching for a flattering label. But the argument of this paper does not rest on that title alone. By the functional definition Scripture itself supplies — sent, church-planting, and willing to suffer for it — every missionary named in this section qualifies as evidence that the gift Paul describes in Ephesians 4 did not cease with the first generation, but was renewed, generation after generation, across nearly four centuries and every inhabited continent, exactly as this paper’s hypothesis proposes.

Reinhard Bonnke preaching to a crowd in Africa

Conclusion: A Summary of the Evidence

Across Scripture, ancient manuscripts, Orthodox tradition, and post-biblical mission history, four independent lines of evidence converge on the same pattern:

From Jesus' Own Words and Holy Scripture

- Ephesians 4:11–13 — Christ gave apostles as a standing gift to His Church "till we all come… unto a perfect man," not a title limited to one generation.
- Luke 10:1–17 — Jesus personally selected, instructed, and sent out Seventy under the same mission charge given the Twelve in Matthew 10.
- Acts 1:21–22 sets the qualification cited on the other side of this debate — eyewitness of the risen Christ — a standard this survey takes seriously.

From Non-Canonical Epistles and Early Church Manuscripts

- Scripture itself calls Barnabas, Andronicus, Junia, Silas, and Timothy "apostles" — none of them among the Twelve.
- Eusebius of Caesarea (4th c.) records Thaddaeus, a man of the Seventy, hailed at Edessa as "an apostle of Jesus."
- Romans 16:7 names Andronicus and Junia as "of note among the apostles," decades after the resurrection, outside the original Twelve.

From Eastern, Greek, and Ethiopian Orthodox Tradition

- The Synaxis of the Seventy Apostles (Jan. 4) formally honors the Seventy as apostles in the Church's own liturgy.
- Agathangelos names Gregory "the first apostle of Armenia"; the Ethiopian Synaxarium calls Frumentius the apostle Ethiopia "did not have."
- As recently as 2016, Pope Francis and Catholicos Karekin II closed a joint declaration by naming Gregory the Illuminator alongside "the Holy Apostles" in ancient prayer.

From Historical and Modern Examples

- John Eliot, John Williams, Pedro Claver, John Ross, and others were sent, planted lasting churches, and suffered — the same three marks Scripture applies to apostleship.
- The title "Equal-to-the-Apostles" (Isapostolos) has been formally applied by the Church across centuries to missionaries whose labor matched the apostolic pattern.
- John Ross's Hangul translation — beginning with the Gospel of Luke, risked at cost to his own life — mirrored the Apostle Paul's ministry twenty centuries earlier and helped set Korea on its path to becoming a Christian nation.

This survey is offered as a denomination-neutral compilation of that evidence — Scripture, ancient manuscript, and documented history — rather than as an argument for any single denomination.

Taken together, this evidence points to one conclusion: Christ's gift of apostles to His Church did not end with the first generation, but has continued, in substance and often in name, from the first century to our own.

Thank you, sincerely, for taking the time to examine this evidence with me. God bless you.

B. Dutch Seyfarth

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